



RECEIVED **TOWN OF BILLERICA**  
OPEN SPACE & RECREATION  
PLAN COMMITTEE  
2023 JAN -4 10:20  
TOWN CLERK  
BILLERICA

Mike Rosa – Chairman  
John Bartlett – Vice Chairman  
Marlies Henderson – Secretary  
Jack Bowen  
Justin Damon  
Maria Martin  
Michael Parker  
Katie Shubin

**DATE: Tue. Jan. 17, 2023**

**TIME: 7:00 PM**

**IN PERSON**

**Location: Collins Room**

## AGENDA

1. Open Mic
2. Approve 11/15/22 meeting minutes
3. Update on RFP OSRP Consultant (Rosa)
4. Coordinate with NMCOG RTP / open space-greenway connectivity (Malgieri, Jennings)
5. Update on town Open Space inventory (Malgieri)
6. Discuss town owned Cabot Land image (Damon)
7. Discuss Shawsheen Tech paddle access (cont'd from 9/20/22) (Rosa)
8. Discussion Talbot Dam Removal / Fish ladder research (cont'd) (Bowen)
9. Nyanza mercury / anadromous fish (Henderson)
10. VVP Disc Golf Course for 2025 OSRP (Parker)
11. Admin updates
  - a. MBTA ROW Heritage Rd North (email 11/21/2022)
  - b. BPD Buckingham & Shawsheen Tech access update (Rosa)
12. Next meeting dates (Henderson)
13. Adjourn

# MBTA’s “Billerica Branch”

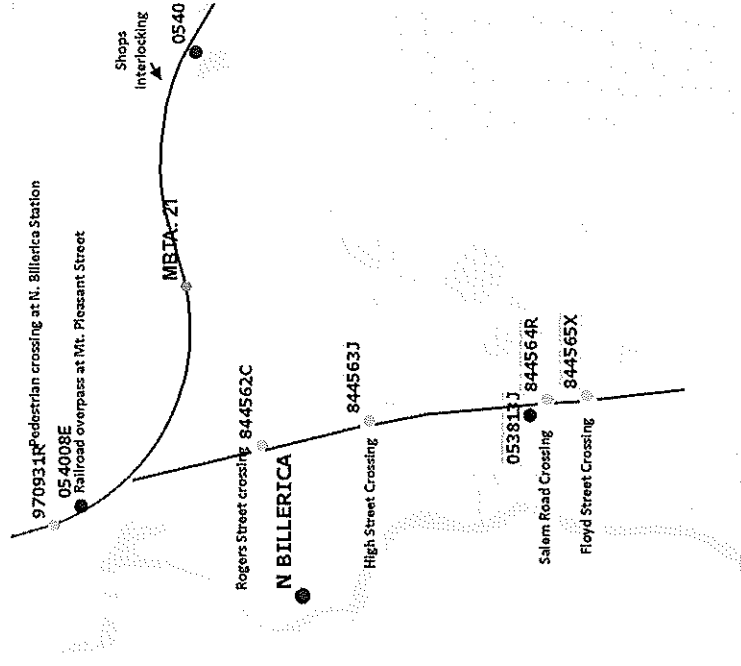
A potential RAILS-**with**-Trails project that links current and proposed regional recreational trails in Eastern Massachusetts

Prepared by Andrew Jennings  
January 13, 2023

## Disclaimer:

Although I currently am Billerica's Representative on the Lowell Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board, the opinions and recommendations contained are my personal ones as a resident of Billerica.

# The “Billerica Branch” is a remnant of the Boston & Maine line between North Billerica and Bedford

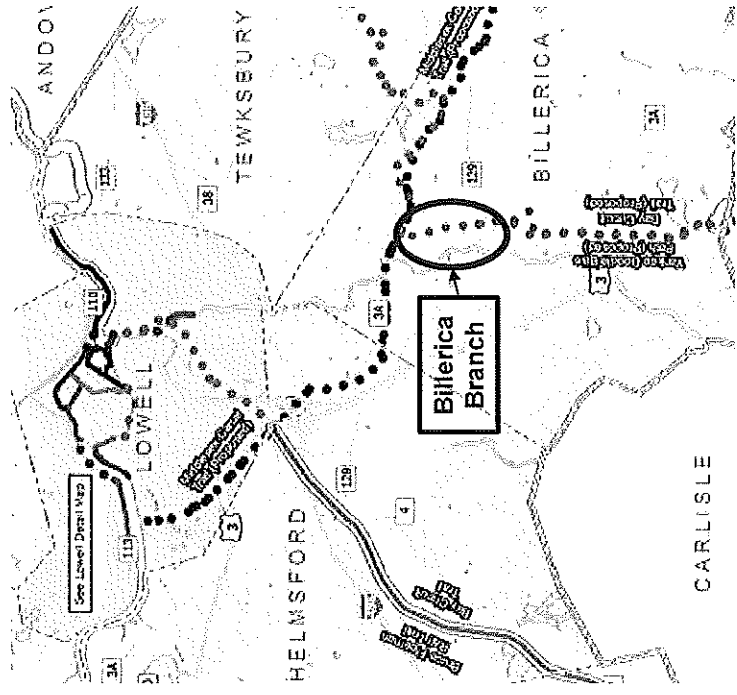


Base map from FRA Office of Safety web site; “Billerica Branch” is shown in black.

- The line is a little less than 2 miles long, extending from a switch off the inbound track of the Lowell Line south of Mt. Pleasant street to almost Heritage Road.
- There are no rail served industries on the line.
- A connection to tracks in Iron Horse Park is located north of Salem Road.
  - Service to industries within Iron Horse Park is normally handled through Shops Interlocking
  - Shops interlocking provides easy access to both the inbound and outbound tracks on the Lowell Line
- The line is rarely used, but it has not been abandoned.
  - Possible uses include
    - Equipment storage
    - Turning equipment
    - Alternate route To Iron Horse Park if Shops interlocking route unavailable
  - Past uses no longer needed
    - Better route for welded rail trains (welding plant closed)
    - Heading locomotives in correct direction after repair (locomotive shop closed)
- For this presentation I have described this line as the “Billerica Branch” because
  - That was the name given to the branch in a Boston and Maine employee timetable
  - It avoids confusion with the existing “Narrow Gauge Rail Trail” in Bedford
  - It is a distinct project from the “Yankee Doodle Bike Path Phase 1” even though it is a logical addition to that project

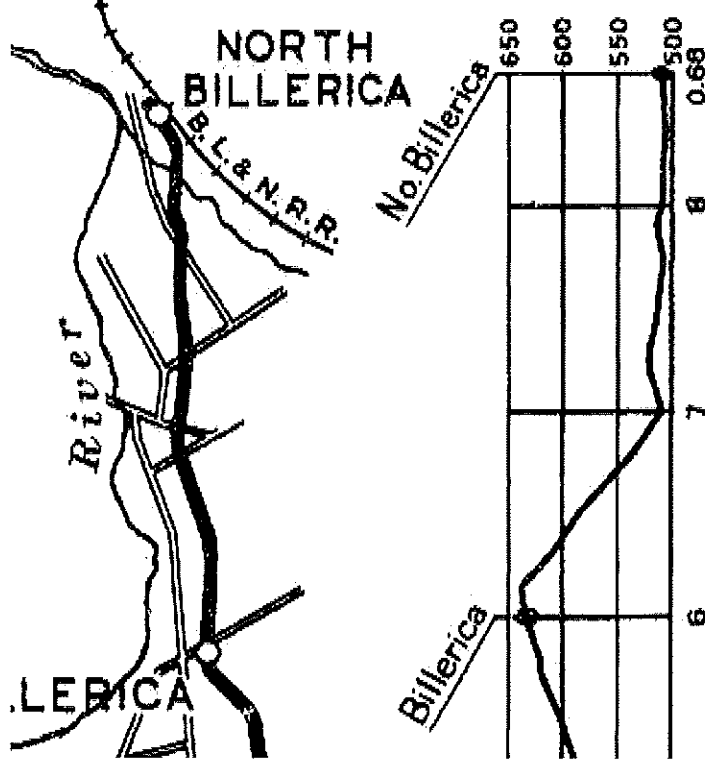
# A trail on the “Billerica Branch” would be a key link in a network of existing and proposed trails

- At the south end, the trail would connect to a shared use path along Boston Road to Billerica Center (under construction) and the proposed Yankee Doodle Bike Path (on TIP for 2024)
- On the north end, MBTA’s property does not connect to any street or road,
  - To make connection, the informal path between Rogers Street and High Street should become part of the project.
  - The informal path would also be an early segment in the proposed Middlesex Canal Trail in Billerica.
- A connection via the proposed Middlesex Canal Trail will link the Yankee Doodle Bike Path to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and extensive trails and paths in Lowell
- Consideration should be given to extending the “Billerica Branch” trail to the North Billerica commuter rail station along the Lowell Line. That would involve complex design issues and should be considered a later phase.



Base map from Northern Middlesex Regional Transportation Plan FFY 2020 – 2040; Map 7.3: Major Trails and Walkways in the Northern Middlesex Region

A trail on the “Billerica Branch” would protect an historic asset, and has potential as an attraction.



Source of diagram: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billerica\\_and\\_Bedford\\_Railroad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billerica_and_Bedford_Railroad)

- A rail line was constructed on the “Billerica Branch” in 1877 by the Billerica and Bedford Railroad.
- The Billerica and Bedford is historically significant as it was the first 2-foot narrow gauge line in the US.
- After the Billerica and Bedford failed, the Boston and Lowell, and predecessor of the Boston and Maine acquired the right of way and rebuilt the line to standard gauge. However, near Heritage Road, it built a bypass of Billerica Center to avoid the steep grades. The bypass rejoined the Billerica and Bedford right of way near Nuttings Lake.
- The Bedford Depot Museum has utilized the Billerica and Bedford Railroad’s history along with the associated bike paths, depot, and restored railroad equipment to become an attraction.

The “Billerica Branch” is not only a rail corridor, but also a utility corridor.



- Major pole lines are present on both sides of the Billerica Branch.
- In developing a trail plan, the needs of the utilities must be incorporated.



## An active transportation path on the Billerica Branch would provide significant benefits to residents of Billerica and the region

- Bring a safe active transportation route between North Billerica and Billerica Center.
  - No set of streets between these areas has sidewalks for the full distance, and there is little bicycle infrastructure in North Billerica
  - Significantly improve access to the Marshall Middle School and BMHS via foot and cycle
- The connections to High and Rogers Streets
  - Would protect the historic treasure of a piece of the Middlesex Canal
  - Be an initial link in the proposed Middlesex Canal Trail in Billerica
- Provide economic and public health benefits of easier access to outdoor recreation



# Recommended next steps

- Meet with MBTA real estate representatives
  - Determine their requirements for rails-with-trails projects which would apply on “Billerica Branch” (e.g., distance from track centerline to fencing; fencing requirements; terms of agreements for trail access)
  - Identify stakeholders who have easements on the Branch and their contacts
  - Obtain detailed map of property
- Meet with other key stakeholders
  - Determine if they have items they would like to include in the project
  - Listen to their concerns
- Do an inhouse pre-feasibility study on the project to identify any insurmountable barriers to the project
- Include the Billerica Branch Rails-with-Trails project in the NMCOG Envision 2050 Regional Transportation Plan, Billerica Master Plan, Billerica Open Space and Recreation Plan, and similar documents to ensure it is eligible for funding.
- Identify sponsors and develop an implementation plan identifying parties that are responsible to move project to completion

Appendix A –  
Additional Information  
on Rails-**with**-trails

## Most rail trails are built as “rails-to-trails”

- **Rails-to-trails**
  - The rail operator applies to abandon operations on a line
  - Approval to abandon from the appropriate body is received.
  - Railroad infrastructure is removed or repurposed for trail use.
- **Rails-with-trails**
  - The property owner provides an easement or other license to the trail operator to locate trail on its property
  - Rail operations continue
  - Appropriate separation / barriers are incorporated for the safe operations of both the trail and railroad
- The Rail to Trails Conservancy estimates that 400 of 2,100 rail trails have incorporated rails-with-trails along a portion of the trail route.

## MassDOT is supportive of Rails-with-Trails projects

In a letter circulated by trail advocates of April 3, 2013, from then MassDOT Secretary and Chief Executive Officer Richard Davey to Steven Smith, then Executive Director of the Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District, Mr. Davey stated,

*Going forward, therefore, MassDOT will as a matter of policy permit the construction of shared-use paths along active or planned railroad rights-of-way provided that appropriate fencing separates the two uses. Further the design and construction of such fencing is an eligible project cost for such projects and MassDOT will participate in funding as appropriate.*

Appendix B –  
Identified key Billerica Branch  
stakeholders

Key Stakeholder	Interest
MBTA	Owner of Billerica Branch, commuter rail operator
CSX Transportation	Rail freight operator with rights to use the Billerica Branch
Utility companies	Have easements with existing power line located on the Billerica Branch
Owner of 96 High Street	Owner of land that informal path between Billerica Branch and High Street is on.
Owner of 14 – 16 Rogers Street	Owner of land that informal path between Billerica Branch and Rogers Street is on.
Middlesex Canal Commission	State commission charged with restoring the Middlesex Canal and related properties



Marlies Henderson <marlies.henderson@gmail.com>

**Ownership of the Billerica Branch**

5 messages

Andrew Jennings <aajennings@aol.com>  
Reply-To: Andrew Jennings <aajennings@aol.com>  
To: "rachael.goldsmith@greyco.com" <rachael.goldsmith@greyco.com>

Mon, Nov 21, 2022 at 10:18 AM

I have been working with the Secretary of the Town of Billerica's Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee as that Committee begins to update the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan in the coming year. One of the goals of the Town's 2018 master plan was to seek more opportunities to expand its trail network. Therefore, I expect the Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee to spend considerable efforts looking at the trail opportunities.

Construction will begin soon on a shared use path along Boston Road between Billerica Center and Heritage Road. The so-called Billerica Branch extends approximately two miles from Heritage Road in a northerly direction to a connection with the MBTA's Lowell line south of Mt. Pleasant St. near the North Billerica commuter rail station. It is likely that there will be discussion of the Billerica Branch as a rail-with-trail extension of Billerica's currently planned trail network at least as far north as where that line crosses the Middlesex Canal. Another trail has been proposed along the towpath of the canal.

My research has uncovered conflicting information on whether some or all of this two-mile line was included in the B&M's sale of lines to the MBTA. Please let me know if the MBTA owns all or a portion of this line, so the town knows who to begin discussions with if and when it decides to explore a rail-with-trail project along this line.

Thank you for your assistance.

Andrew Jennings  
North Billerica, MA  
cell: (978) 944-1450

Andrew Jennings <aajennings@aol.com>  
Reply-To: Andrew Jennings <aajennings@aol.com>  
To: "rachel.goldsmith@greyco.com" <rachel.goldsmith@greyco.com>

Mon, Nov 21, 2022 at 10:28 AM

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Andrew Jennings <aajennings@aol.com>  
Reply-To: Andrew Jennings <aajennings@aol.com>  
To: "marlies.henderson@gmail.com" <marlies.henderson@gmail.com>

Mon, Nov 21, 2022 at 2:32 PM

Good news. The MBTA recognizes the public nature of its ownership and will allow appropriate rails-with-trails that are designed with appropriate fencing. The next challenge is to find the valuation plans and see how much width we have to work with.

Andrew

-----Original Message-----

From: Rachel Goldsmith <Rachel.Goldsmith@greyco.com>  
To: Andrew Jennings <aajennings@aol.com>  
Cc: Pat FitzGibbon <Pat.FitzGibbon@greyco.com>  
Sent: Mon, Nov 21, 2022 1:11 pm  
Subject: RE: Ownership of the Billerica Branch

Hi Andrew,

Thanks for reaching out. The MBTA owns from just north of Heritage Road north until that line reaches the main line. They just sold the piece that runs along Heritage Road to Boston Road but retained an easement in anticipation of the rail trail. I am cc'ing Pat FitzGibbon from our office who manages rail trail issues and attaching a plan of the recent sale.


Please let me know if either of you needs anything else on this one.

Thanks,  
Rachel

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 **Billerica Trail Easement Plan.pdf**  
570K

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**Andrew Jennings** <aajennings@aol.com>  
Reply-To: Andrew Jennings <aajennings@aol.com>  
To: "Rachel.Goldsmith@greyco.com" <Rachel.Goldsmith@greyco.com>  
Cc: "Pat.FitzGibbon@greyco.com" <Pat.FitzGibbon@greyco.com>

Mon, Nov 21, 2022 at 2:34 PM

Many thanks for your prompt response. I would expect someone from the Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee to contact Pat FitzGibbon early in 2023.

Andrew Jennings

-----Original Message-----

From: Rachel Goldsmith <Rachel.Goldsmith@greyco.com>  
To: Andrew Jennings <aajennings@aol.com>  
Cc: Pat FitzGibbon <Pat.FitzGibbon@greyco.com>  
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Please let me know if either of you needs anything else on this one.

Thanks,  
Rachel

**From:** Andrew Jennings <aajennings@aol.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, November 21, 2022 10:29 AM  
**To:** Rachel Goldsmith <Rachel.Goldsmith@greyco.com>  
**Subject:** Ownership of the Billerica Branch

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[Quoted text hidden]

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**Marlies Henderson** <marlies.henderson@gmail.com>  
To: Andrew Jennings <aajennings@aol.com>

Mon, Nov 21, 2022 at 3:51 PM

Very good news indeed.  
I shall include the email in the OSRPC packet for the January meeting!  
Woohoo!  
This will result in better digestion of the turkey on the National Day of Mourning!  
Happy Thanksgiving,  
Marlies

[Quoted text hidden]

---  
Marlies Henderson, CIG  
marliesoutdoors.com

*"People protect what they love" (Jacques Yves Cousteau)*



# Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee (OSRPC) Meeting Minutes

**November 15, a duly scheduled and posted in person meeting**

Rosa opens meeting at 7:01 PM. A quorum is present.

Present: John Bartlett, Jack Bowen, Justin Damon, Marlies Henderson, Michael Parker, Michael Rosa,  
Speaker phone: Maria Martin  
Excused: Katie Shubin  
Absent: (Ex Officio) Kat Malgiery, Senior Planner

1. Open mic: No public comments.
2. Rosa suggested a minor amendment, and Bartlett moved to approve the September 20 minutes as amended, Parker seconded.  
Unanimous vote to approve: 7-0-0<sup>1</sup>
3. Henderson shared an email discussing RR ROW. After brief discussion, all agreed that these comments are premature, and will be used in public comment for the plan update.
4. Henderson shared an email discussing the NMCOG RTP (regional transportation plan). After brief discussion, all agreed that these comments are premature, and will be used in public comment for the plan update. **Henderson**<sup>2</sup> will forward links to RTP and Envision 2050 surveys.
5. No updates in Town inventory.
6. No updates on NMCOG RTP / open space – greenway connectivity.
7. Henderson reports she works with Isabel on signage (trail blazes, river access, Fox Hill trail access). Discussion ensued about a potential Assessor-mailing with Water Report to RFA / WTP real estate parcels. **Bowen** will discuss with Isabel.
8. **Rosa** attended Shawsheen Tech *Truck or Treat* in hopes of meeting Tony, but missed him. He tried to reach him by phone, and expects a call back.
9. **Bowen** will try to contact a Chelmsford company (originally from Billerica) that specializes in fish ladders. Brief discussion on Talbot Dam ownership, removal, auxiliary drinking water sources (Shawsheen, MRWA). **Henderson** will find answer for anadromous fish sent upstream to inedible fish due to mercury.

7:20 PM Parker is excused and leaves

10. **Henderson** briefs the committee members on the DCR/MARTAB Trails Conference she attended. Once the links to the ppt presentations are live, she will add them to her report, and share it.
11. Next meeting will be 1/3/2023 in person, Collins Room.
12. 7:50 PM, meeting adjourned (motion by Bartlett, seconded by Bowen).

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<sup>1</sup> In favor - opposed - abstention

<sup>2</sup> Bold font indicates action item

From website: <https://merrimack.org/talbotmills/>

FAQ, updated 12/1/2022

**16) What is the impact of the high levels of mercury pollution in our rivers on the migrating fish and those who eat them?**

The adult river herring and shad and their young will spend a very small portion of their lives in these rivers. The adults migrate into rivers to spawn—an essential but brief part of their life cycle. Most juveniles depart for the ocean in their first autumn (after less than 6 months) and are small (less than 2 or 3 inches long). This is a very short time to accumulate these toxins. River herring and shad eat plankton, which is low on the food chain, so they get much less exposure to toxins than wildlife that eat fish (such as bass, herons, or eagles). They will also be safe for other fish, wildlife, and people to eat when living in the ocean. American eels, however, spend many years in fresh water and can accumulate more toxins. There are health advisories on eating fish that spend most of their lives in this watershed. In the long run, much of the mercury is slowly getting buried in the sediments where it can do less harm.

